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Acquisition of Negation in Manipuri-Speaking Children

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Abstract

The study was carried out to study the acquisition of negation in twenty monolingual Manipuri-speaking children within the age of 2 to 4 years in a natural setting. This study has focused on the form and function of negation in Manipuri to figure out the developmental patterns. The functions of negation are rejection, non-existence, prohibition, and denial. The study was carried out to check whether the developmental pattern follows or violates this sequence of functions. Thus one of the main aims of this work is to identify the sequence of functions of negation during the course of acquisition. This study has also checked which of the functions is more frequently used by the children (for instance, hypothetically rejection may be used more frequently as compared to say denial). The study focuses on the initial stages of language development in the early children's speech. It is possible that only few of the negation functions are found in these subjects.

Key words: Negation, acquisition, rejection, denial, prohibition, disappearance.

Introduction

Generally speaking, scholars who have worked on acquisition of negation have examined the form/function interface across development, along with explanation of syntactic contexts of negation in children's language. The studies of the acquisition of negation by children have mainly focused on the developmental aspects of negative form (Klima & Bellugi, 1966; Bellugi, 1967) and semantic categories of negatives (Bloom, 1970; Mc. Neill & Mc. Neill, 1973; de Villiers & de Villiers, 1979). These studies examined negation in children's spontaneous conversation with adults and have been carried out mostly on Indo-European languages. Very less systematic account has been attempted in the case of modern Indian languages so far.

Theoretical Background

Earlier studies in negation were based on grammar. Klima and Bellugi (1966), and Bellugi (1967) have mainly focused on the syntax of children's negation. They have identified four distinct stages reflecting the linguistic derivation of negative sentences in a standard transformational grammar. Subsequent work on negation has focused on Bellugi's first stage, the initial 'No + negative'. This 'negative + sentence' has been considered as a universal first stage in the acquisition of negation (Mc. Neill, 1970). This universality has, however, been questioned by others (Bloom, 1970; Bowerman, 1973).

Functions of Negation in Children's Speech

Analysis of the children's negative utterances indicates a developmental sequence in the acquisition of the functions of negation, the order of acquisition being: Rejection, Non-existence, Prohibition and Denial. The negative functions available to the children are given in the following table. These functions are:

1) Rejection of
    a) Parental offer
    b) Parental proposal (direct imperatives)
    c) Parental suggestion for an action (indirect imperatives)
2) Disappearance/non-existence of
    a) Agents
    b) Objects
3) Prohibition of
    a) Parental action
    b) Parental verbalization
4) Denial of
    a) Parental proposition
    b) Parental proposition implicit in a question

Two Types of Negative Formation

According to Yashwant (2000), in many languages, there are two types of negative formation that usually have been accounted to appear. In English, one of these is formed by verbal modifiers such as *not, never, hardly*, etc. and in Japanese it is *nai*. This kind of negative formation is called sentential negation. The other type of negative makes use of negative prefixes such as *in-, dis-, un-, im-, in-* in English and *hi-, hu-, mu-*, etc. in Japanese.

This is called affixial negation or negation at word-level. In Burmese, attaching the negative morpheme ma- to the head verb negates sentences. In Tibetan, the prefix *ma-* has a negative force, and is used with the verbal root. Negative adjectives are formed by the affixes *-ma, -mi, -med,* and others, which are suffixed to the root and then modified.

Manipuri as a Tibeto-Burman Language

Manipuri, locally known as Meiteilon (the Meitei + lon 'language'), is spoken in the state of Manipur which is in North-Eastern India. Manipuri belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages and is placed in the Kuki-Chin sub-group. Manipuri shares genetic features of Tibeto-Burman. Some of such features include phonemic tone, SOV word order, agglutinative verb morphology and the tendency to reduce disyllabic forms to monosyllabic ones. Very specifically, Manipuri has extensive verb morphology, extensive suffix marking in contrast to a more limited prefixation.

Negation in Manipuri

In Manipuri, negative is formed by suffixation of negative markers, *viz-a-viz, -te, -de, -loy, -roy* to the verb as in sentence (1) and (2) given below.

1 (a) m↔hak ca th↔k -i
He tea drink Pres
'He drinks tea'.

(b) m↔hak ca th↔k -te
he tea drink Neg
'He does not drink tea'.

2 (a) ↔i N↔si Lila yeN -g↔ni
I today drama watch fut
'I will watch a drama today'.

(b) ↔i N↔si Lila yeN -loy
I today drama watch Neg
'I will not watch a drama today'.

Five markers are considered to form negation in Manipuri. Out of these, four occur as suffixes and one as frozen (or lexicalized) form.

Negative Markers

According to Yashwant (2000), Manipuri has five negative markers which are following:

1. *-te, -de* used in realized aspect/ non future
2. *-loy, -roy* used in unrealized/ future
3. *–kum, -gum* used in let negative
4. *-nu* used in prohibitive sentence
5. *n↔tte* is a lexicalized negator

E.g. **a) *–ta* or *–te*; b) *–loy*; c) *–kum*; d) *–nu*; e) *natte –ta*** or-***te***

For the function of rejection and disappearance the variable '-te/-de' is used, for prohibition the markers '-no/-nu', for denial the marker '-roy/-loy' and the markers like '-kum/-gum' and 'nətte' for other functions like negative assertion and so on.

Methodology

The methodology followed in this study is similar to Vaidyanathan's method (1989), where data from parent-child interactions was collected from twenty monolingual Manipuri-speaking home environments. Data was collected from children aged 2 to 4. There are two groups based on the age range of 2 to 4, where the first group consists of children within the age range of 2 to 3 and the second group has children within the age range of 3 to 4. There are 10 subjects each in the two groups. The subjects were visited at their respective homes once every week or two and during the visits some 30-45 minutes of video-recordings were made using a video camera.

Data and Analysis

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF GROUP 1

NUMBER OF CASES: 20 NUMBER OF VARIABLES: 5

NAME	N	MEAN	STD. DEV.	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
te/de	10	2.80	.0.919	1	4
roy/loy	10	2.00	.667	1	2

kum/gum	10	1..50	.527	1	2
no/nu	10	2.20	.789	1	3
natte	10	1.30	.483	1	2

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL SCORES OF NEGATION IN GROUP 1.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF GROUP 2

NUMBER OF CASES: 20 NUMBER OF VARIABLES: 5

NAME	N	MEAN	STD. DEV.	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
te/de	10	4.10	.876	3	5
roy/loy	10	3.00	.816	2	4
kum/gum	10	2.00	.667	1	3
no/nu	10	3.50	.850	2	5
natte	10	1.70	.675	1	3

TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL SCORES OF NEGATION IN GROUP 2.

CORRELATION MATRIX

CORRELATION MATRIX OF GROUP 1

CASES CORRELATED: 1 TO 10

	Te/de	Roy/loy	Kum/gum	No/nu	natte
te/de	1				
roy/loy	.181	1			
kum/gum	.459	-.326	1		
no/nu	-.245	.634	.000	1	
natte	-.100	.345	.655	.408	1

CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT 0.05 LEVEL (2-TAILED).

TABLE 3: CORRELATION MATRIX OF GROUP 1.

CORRELATION MATRIX OF GROUP 2

CASES CORRELATED: 11 TO 20

	Te/de	Roy/loy	Kum/gum	No/nu	natte
te/de	1				
roy/loy	.466	1			
kum/gum	.381	.612	1		
no/nu	.075	.160	.588	1	
natte	.432	.000	.000	-.484	1

CORRELATION IS SIGNIFICANT AT 0.05 LEVEL (2-TAILED).

TABLE 4: CORRELATION MATRIX OF GROUP 2.

GROUP 1-GROUP 2

Variable	Mean (x1)	Std. Dev.	T-value	Mean (x2)	Std. Dev.	Probability
te/de	2.80	.919	3.2379	4.10	.876	0.3589
roy/loy	2.00	.699	3.0005	3.00	.816	0.1795
kum/gum	1.50	.527	1.8600	2.00	.667	0.1026

no/nu	2.20	.789	3.5447	3.50	.850	0.2821
natte	1.30	.483	1.5240	1.70	.675	0.0769

TABLE 5: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICAL SCORE OF GROUP 1 AND GROUP 2

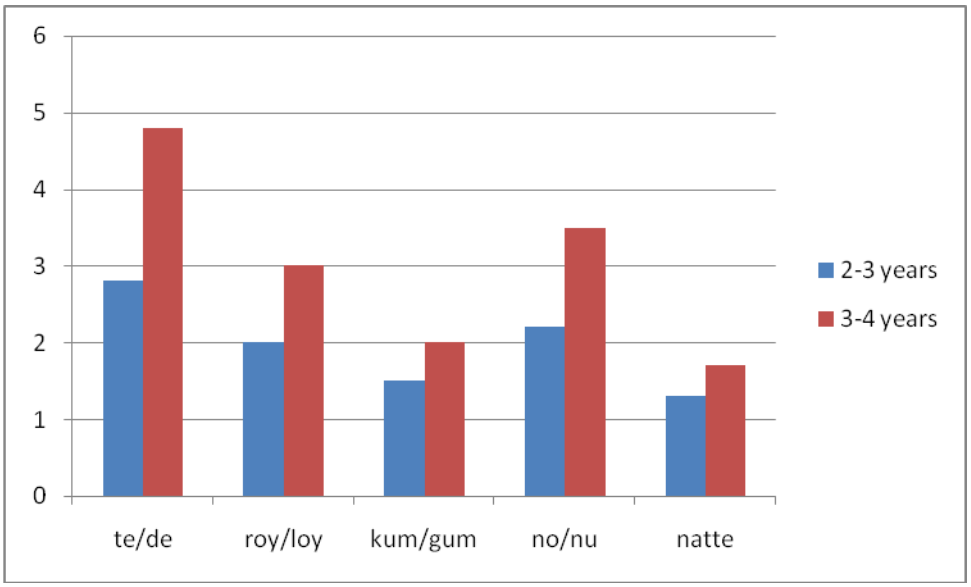

FIGURE 1**:** Combined histogram of all the negative markers with two age groups

Observations and Findings

A close observation of the data thus collected has shown that negative marker '-te/-de' is the most fairly occurring negation in all the age groups of children followed by '-no/-nu' which is further followed by the variable '-roy/-loy'. It is evident that this pattern is maintained in all the age groups even though the incidence of their use increases along the age.

The t-tests results of differences are significant in age group 1 and age group 2 for the negative markers '-te/-de' , '-roy/-loy' and '-no/-nu' and not significant for the variable '-kum/-gum' and 'nətte', since the computed t value is equal to or not more than tabulated –t

value 2.101 at degree of freedom 18, for P 0.05. This has clearly indicated that not much acquisitional change have taken place with regard to the use of these negative markers even when the child has grown to the age of 2 years. The computed t is far more than tabulated-t the same paradigm is reflected as there are more wider disparities with regards to '-te/-de', '-roy/-loy' and '-kum/-gum' in comparison to the rest of the negative markers and thus similar patterns are noted in other tables. Whereas the mean value of negative markers '-te/-de', '-no/-nu', '-roy/-loy' are 2.8, 2.2, 2.0 respectively in the age group 1.This has increased in group 2 with the respective scores being 4.1, 3.5, and 3.0.

There is highest correlation between the variables *'-kum/-gum'* and *'nətte'* and *'-roy/-loy'* and *'-kum/-gum'*, which are .655 and .634 respectively. There is positive correlation between the two variables. This implies that if the variable *'-kum/-gum'* is increased then the variable *'nətte'* increases. Thus there is positive correlation between *'-kum/-gum'* and *'-te/-de'*, which is .459 and also between *'-no/-nu'* and *'nətte'*, which is .408. There is less correlation between *'-te/-de'* and *'-roy/-loy'*, which is .345. The correlation between the variables *'-roy/-loy'* and *'-kum/-gum'*, *'-no/-nu'* and *'-te/-de'* is negative. The inverse correlation values are -.326 and -.245 respectively. This means that if *'-roy/-loy'* increases then *'-kum/-gum'* decreases and vice versa. This is the case for the variables *'-no/-nu'* and *'-te/-de'*. In other words, if *'-no/-nu'* is acquired then *'-te/-de'* will be less acquired.

In group 2, the highest positive correlation is found between the negative markers *'-roy/-loy'* and *'-kum/-gum'* which is .612, whereas the next high positive correlation is seen between the variables *'-kum/-gum'* and *'-no/-nu'* where it is .588. The other positive correlation is seen between the variables *'-te/-de'* and *'-roy/-loy'*, *'-te/-de'* and *'-kum/-gum'*, and *'-te/-de'* and *'nətte'*. In all these cases, even though the correlation is not very high, their values being .466, .381and .432 respectively.

Table 5 shows that the differences are significant in age group 1 and age group 2 for the negative markers *'-te/-de'* , *'-roy/-loy'* and *'-no/-nu'* and not significant for the variable *'-kum/-gum'* and *'nətte'*, since the computed-t value is equal to or more than tabulated –t value 2.101 at degree of freedom 18, for P 0.05. The computed-t value for the variables *'-kum/-gum'* and *'nətte'* were 1.860 and 1.524 respectively and hence insignificant. This indicates that not much acquisitional change have taken place with regard to the use of these negative markers even when the child grows to the age of 2 years. Figure 1 represent the combined histogram of the five variables under study, with respective means of the two age groups on

the y-axis and age group on the x-axis. In figure 1, it can be seen that there is consistent increase in the acquisition of the variable *'-te/-de'*, with considerable increase in the second group. This is the case with the variables *'-roy/-loy'*, and *'-no/-nu'*. When we look at figure 1, there is consistent increase in use of variables as the age group increases.

Conclusion

The study supports that negation expected to appear in following order:

'-te/-de'> '-no/-nu'> '-roy/-loy'> '-kum/-gum'> '-nətte'.

The relevant statistical data drawn from observations made during the investigation are provided in some tables. The first twotables show that the use of the negative markers increase with age. The data thus support the sequence that rejection and disappearance is acquired first followed by prohibition which is further followed by denial and lastly other types of functions. The results support Pea's (1979) view that rejection is usually the simplest to acquire because it expresses the child's emotional attitude towards something present in context. Therefore it requires no internal representation, whereas non-existence requires internal representation as the child is expected to visualize something which is not present in the situation. However, in the data it is clearly evident that children in group 1 have already acquired this function of negation. According to Pea, non-existence is followed by denial, because it needs internal representation of a proposition. Therefore denial is a more complex cognitively. Another careful observation is that based on the utterances of the children it is evident that negation is primarily expressed by means of verbal inflection in Manipuri. This implies that two-year old children have acquired the inflectional system for negation in Manipuri along with the use of negative markers, which has significantly increased with the age 2 to 4 years.

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Abbreviations

TB	: Tibeto-burman
SOV	: Subject Object Verb
VSO	: Verb Subject Objecct
Pres	: Present tense marker
Neg	: Negative marker
Fut	: Future tense marker
Nom	: Nominative marker
Acc	: Accusative marker
Sugg	: Suggestive marker
Det	: Determiner

Loc : Locative

Be : Verb + be

SPSS : Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

Infl : Inflection

Comp : Complementizer

Perf : Perfect

Dur : Durative verb

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